

## XIII. Meet the Church

June 23/24, 2010

Colossians 4:7-18

**Aim:** To appreciate that Christian ministry is a team effort and that Christians are connected across time and space through our union in Christ.

As Paul closes Colossians, he encloses with his letter a verbal group photograph or a number of snapshots of fine first-century Christians. He includes in it a number of those who helped him in his ministry while he was imprisoned at Rome. Only in Romans 16 do we find a longer list of people in Paul's epistles than this one. Although Paul was under arrest pending trial in Rome when he wrote these words, he was not alone. He was at the center of an extensive network of friends and helpers. To Paul, these people were indispensable assets to his ministry. He knew well that he could not do it alone; no one can. Paul never worked alone. The eight men he names are not all well-known figures. Each was, however, a special person to Paul. And each was willing to pay the price of associating with a prisoner. God's leaders have always depended on others to support them in their work. This section adds a warm, personal touch to what has been largely a doctrinal letter.

Paul was a man of capacity for friendship. He had a warm and a big heart. This point needs to be made because the idea has gained ground in recent years that the apostle was a severe and unattractive man who inspired respect rather than affection. According to this view, Paul was a man who overawed and drove people, whereas Jesus won their hearts. It is surprising how persistent this idea is when all the evidence is against it (cp. Acts 20:37-38).

As we read through these closing verses, we notice that the apostle speaks with such tenderness about each of the people he mentions, with the exception of Demas. Although he was cut off in prison, he was not separated from the love of the Lord, or his Christian friends. They were very dear to him; together, they had gone through so much.

By emphasizing the bond that linked him to the church of Colossae, Paul could prove beyond doubt that he had an accurate picture of their situation and that he had a right to express his concerns about the predatory newcomers who had almost seized control there.

### A. Messengers to the Lycus Valley (Colossians 4:7-9)

#### 1. Tychicus, the Faithful Servant (4:7-8)

*Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. I am sending him to you for this very purpose, that he may know your circumstances and comfort your hearts...*

##### a) His Activities

The Scriptures mention Tychicus, whose name means 'fortunate' or 'fortuitous,' only five times (Acts 20:4; Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7; 2 Tim. 4:12; Titus 3:12). We first meet him in Acts 20:4, when Paul, on his third missionary journey, was on his way to Jerusalem, taking gifts from the churches in Europe to help Jewish believers. Since he was a native of the province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the major city, he was probably a convert of Paul's long ministry in that city. Very likely he had been born in Ephesus, lived there, and found new life there under Paul's ministry. As Tychicus first traveled with Paul to Jerusalem, he probably carried with him the

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Ephesians' offering for the poor in Jerusalem. Tychicus' willingness to travel with Paul to Jerusalem shows his servant's heart.

When Paul was arrested, Tychicus, along with Dr. Luke and others, stayed with Paul throughout his arrest and imprisonment in Caesarea, his dramatic appearances before kings and governors, his miserable voyage and shipwreck en route to Rome, and his residence in Rome awaiting trial. Thus we see that Tychicus was a man of intense devotion to God.

By now the two men had been together for four years and Tychicus was entrusted with a perilous mission. To get from Rome to Colossae he would first have to cross the Italian peninsula on foot, then make the first of two sea-crossings over the Adriatic to Illyricum, modern Albania. This would be followed by another long slog on foot along the Egnatian way through Macedonia until he reached the port of Thessalonica on the Aegean Sea. A second sea crossing would take him to Ephesus on the coast of Asia Minor. Colossae lay a hundred miles inland from Ephesus in the Lycus Valley. It would be long, time-consuming, potentially hazardous and exhausting, and Tychicus had a precious burden to carry. He had to get the letters we know as Colossians and Philemon to their destinations and, since he went by way of Ephesus, it is highly likely that he delivered that epistle as well on the same trip (Eph. 6:21). That he was entrusted with delivering three inspired books of Scripture once again indicated Paul's trust in him. There was also a letter from Paul to the believers in nearby Laodicea that has not survived. Modern Christians owe a great deal to the fact that Tychicus carried out his mission successfully.

Tychicus had two duties on that long trip: the first was to deliver the epistles of Paul to their destinations; the second duty was simply to tell the churches in Asia about Paul's situation. 'All the news' translates the Greek phrase *ta kat' eme panta*. The people who carried Paul's letters to their destinations were usually trusted co-workers who would be able to elaborate the content of the letter as well as to inform the readers in more detail about Paul's situation.

Clearly, Tychicus was a trusted – and much traveled! – associate of Paul's. Later references in Titus 3:12 and 2 Timothy 4:12 confirm that he continued to perform this function for the rest of Paul's life and ministry. Paul even considered that Tychicus could be a stand-in for Titus, the leader of the churches in Crete (Titus 3:12). At the very end of Paul's life, during his second Roman imprisonment, Tychicus was still with him. Facing imminent execution, Paul desired to see Timothy one last time. Because Timothy could not leave his congregation at Ephesus without a replacement, Paul sent Tychicus (2 Tim. 4:12). Once again, Tychicus' name comes up as a replacement for one of Paul's prominent associates. That speaks highly of his character.

### *b) His Character*

Our verses reveal a number of things about the character of Tychicus. Paul was obviously concerned to establish the 'bona fides' of Tychicus so that the Colossians will give him a respectful hearing when he arrives. First, Paul calls him a 'beloved brother.' That Paul calls him a 'brother' shows he was one of the family of believers. He was greatly loved by Paul and the church in Rome, which is no small thing. He was also called 'faithful minister.' 'Minister' translates a Greek word (*diakonos*) which means 'servant' in a general sense. It is clear that Tychicus was no untried novice, but a man who had already proved that he could be trusted with a great task. Tychicus was gifted with dependability in service. He never achieved prominence, but he served in an important capacity as Paul's liaison to the churches. Paul rounded off his description as a 'fellow servant (*syndoulos*) of the Lord.' This term expressed an equality between Paul and Tychicus. Paul was saying in effect, 'I'm not Tychicus' master, though he is

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serving me.’ Paul saw Tychicus as a man like himself, a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Their gifts may have differed, but at the level of commitment their two hearts beat as one.

From the beautiful teamwork of Paul and Tychicus we learn some great truths about fullness in service. *There is greatness in the smallest things done for Christ.* What would be the use of Paul’s writing a letter if it did not get delivered? What would be the use of his towering thought in the opening chapters of Colossians and its compelling application if no one ever read it? When Tychicus was doing the smallest thing, he was serving Christ. *We must realize that momentary things done for Christ are eternal.* The letters which Tychicus bore to Asia would outlast the Roman Empire! Tychicus’ name would be known until the end of time. The Church now is far richer because of Colossae and Paul and his fellow servant Tychicus.

### 2. Onesimus, the Transformed Slave (4:9)

*...with Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will make known to you all things which are happening here.*

Tychicus would not be traveling alone. His companion was Onesimus, whom we met in the short epistle to Philemon. Philemon was one of the leaders of the Colossian church, and it is likely that the church met in his home. Onesimus was ‘one of you,’ that is, he was from Colossae. He was an unbelieving slave who was “useless” (Phm. 11). Miserable, ungrateful Onesimus had stolen from his master Philemon and fled to Ephesus and then on to Rome to become lost in the anonymity of that huge, faceless populace. But instead of losing himself, he was found by his master’s Lord, Jesus Christ and converted under the ministry of Paul.

An amazing transformation had now taken place. Once restless and insolent, Onesimus was not clear-eyed and straightforward. Onesimus had been revolutionized by God’s grace and was a testimony to the power of God to transform a life. He was going back to face the music, but Paul’s short letter to his master, Philemon, himself a Christian, was intended to smooth the path with a tender appeal for forgiveness, given that Onesimus was now a changed man, a wonderful example of the power of God. He had once been feckless and irresponsible, dealing with problems by running away from them, but now he was ‘a faithful and beloved brother.’

Onesimus is not described as a ‘fellow servant’ or ‘minister.’ The former term would certainly be inappropriate, since it could also be translated ‘fellow slave’ (*doulos* is the root). And, as the letter to Philemon makes clear, it is exactly Onesimus’ status as a slave that is at issue. While we should be careful not to read too much into Paul’s silence on the matter, it is perhaps also the case that Onesimus was not part of Paul’s ‘ministry team.’ Nevertheless, Paul clearly treats Onesimus as on the same level as his trusted associates Epaphras and Tychicus – a quite astonishing thing to do in light of Onesimus’ status as a slave.

### B. Greetings to the Lycus Valley (Colossians 4:10-14)

Verses 10-15 are held together by the theme of greeting. At this point Paul included greetings from a number of Christians who were closely involved with him but who would not be making the journey to Colossae. The first three were ‘of the circumcision’ (4:11). The Gentiles in Rome were ready to mix but it was not so with the Jewish believers who legalistically demanded that the Gentiles be circumcised and follow Jewish ceremonial law. When Paul came to Rome, these legalistic-minded Jewish believers gave him a cool reception, even rejecting the authenticity of his missionary charge. Only the three Jews named here helped him. The fact that the bulk of the

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Jewish people at that time had not responded in faith to Israel's Messiah was something that Paul felt very keenly (cp. Rom. 9:1-5).

The other three companions of Paul who sent greetings were Gentiles. Language, national animosities, and differences in religion and culture had divided the world of that day into hostile camps which could only be held together by the sword. Here under Paul's aegis both camps were meeting together willingly and lovingly – an amazing unity!

### 1. Three Jewish Companions (4:10-11)

#### a) *Aristarchus, the Fellow Prisoner (4:10a)*

*Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you...*

Aristarchus, like Tychicus, figures in the later stages of Paul's ministry. He was a Jew of the Diaspora, born in Thessalonica (Acts 20:4; 27:2). Aristarchus first appeared during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus. He had been seized by the rioting mob in Ephesus that had resented the way that Paul's preaching had undermined the flourishing trade in silver trinkets of the goddess Diana (Acts 19:39). He accompanied Paul on his return trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4), and on his voyage to Rome (Acts 27:4). It is possible he stayed with Paul throughout his imprisonment in Palestine as well.

Paul calls Aristarchus my 'fellow prisoner.' This term translates *synaichmalōtos*, which literally means 'one caught with a spear.' It refers to war captives, or prisoners. Had Paul intended a reference to a literal imprisonment, he would have used *syndesmios*, which is built on his usual word for 'prisoner.'

It was not that he had been arrested along with Paul and held pending trial as he was. It was rather that he had taken up residence in the prison voluntarily in order to be a helper and companion to Paul. He was in prison because he chose to be. That he chose to make Paul's lifestyle his own speaks of his sympathetic, caring heart. He gave up his own freedom to minister to Paul's own needs. He was an outstanding example of practical compassion at work.

#### b) *Mark, the Reconciled Helper (4:10b)*

*...with Mark the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions: if he comes to you, welcome him)...*

John Mark was the author of Mark's gospel. He was the son of a woman named Mary, in whose house the early Jerusalem Christian community met (Acts 12:12). At one time he had proved a great disappointment to Paul. On the apostle's first missionary journey, at Perga in Pamphylia, a much younger Mark had deserted Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:13). This in turn had led to a parting of the ways between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:37-39). Barnabas wanted to give Mark a second chance, whereas Paul feared he would be a liability. This split must have taken place around 49 AD.

Fortunately, the story does not end there. By the time Paul wrote Colossians, Mark had become a changed man. He had been restored to usefulness, probably through the ministry of the apostle Peter, a man who had himself been restored to spiritual usefulness after a shameful display of cowardice (cp. 1 Pe. 5:13). Mark apparently had a significant ministry in Rome, since he is mentioned by Peter who also was writing from that city. And it was probably from Rome that Mark wrote the gospel bearing his name. At any rate, time had passed and Mark had built for himself a reputation as a steady and useful Christian and he and Paul had reconciled. Now,

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twelve years later in 61 AD, John Mark was with Paul, ministering to him in his imprisonment. In the accompanying letter to Philemon he called Mark his ‘fellow worker’ (Phm. 24). By the time of Paul’s final imprisonment, when 2 Timothy was written, Mark had become one of his most stalwart and valuable companions (cp. 2 Tim. 4:11).

Paul had no lingering suspicions of him and clearly thought that he deserved a welcome in Colossae as a believer in good standing. They were not to shun him because of his previous failure. When Paul referred to ‘instructions’ (*entolas*) concerning Mark, it is likely that they did not originate from him. Had Paul issued the instructions, we would expect him to state it more directly, for example: ‘I have given you instructions about him.’ Perhaps, then, the instructions came from Peter and/or Barnabas, who had already requested that the Colossians ‘reinstate’ Mark. The way Paul mentions Barnabas (as Mark’s cousin) certainly suggests that he was already known to the Colossians, and it may be that he had taken up some of Paul’s responsibilities in Asia in the Apostle’s absence (the New Testament is silent about the ministry of Barnabas after his split with Paul). Further indication that Mark was not ‘under Paul’s command’ is the uncertain way in which Paul talks about his coming to the Colossians.

We might call Mark the man with a second chance. His life was a testimony to God’s ability to use failures. In fact, he later received a privilege shared by only three other men in history: writing one of the gospels.

### *c) Jesus Justus, the Roman Jew (4:11)*

*...and Jesus who is called Justus. These are my only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are of the circumcision; they have proved to be a comfort to me.*

We know little of the third Jewish Christian listed by Paul except what is in this verse. Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew Yehoshua (‘Yahweh saves’) and Justus is a Latin surname meaning ‘righteous.’ It is possible that he was one of the Roman Jews who believed Paul’s message (Acts 28:24). Like John Mark, he had ‘proved to be a comfort to Paul and had helped to put a new heart in him.

It would seem that all the other Jews where Paul was, had refused to accept that he had been sent by God. The lack of response from his fellow Jews must have grieved Paul’s heart. However, these three stood by him and were a great comfort to him in his ‘chains’ and in his distress. *Parēgoria* (‘encouraged’) appears only here in the New Testament. It could also be translated ‘comfort.’ Jesus Justus, along with Aristarchus and Mark, was a source of comfort and encouragement to Paul. That Jesus Justus was willing to leave his people to identify with Paul demonstrates his strong commitment.

## **2. Three Gentile Companions (4:12-14)**

### *a) Epaphras, the Fervent Pastor (4:12-13)*

*Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has a great zeal for you, and those who are in Laodicea, and those in Hierapolis.*

Epaphras was a citizen of Colossae himself, as Paul emphasizes (‘one of you’). In fact, Epaphras was the founder of the churches in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras had probably come to know Christ when Paul was ministering in Ephesus, and had gone back to the Lycus Valley where God used him to bring the Good News to its towns. He was probably the current pastor of the church

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in Colossae and had made the long journey to Rome to seek help and guidance once he had realized the extent of the threat posed by the newcomers. He was concerned about the Gnostic heresy which threatened to rob the Colossians of their fullness. Paul's generous tribute to this good man was partly intended to bolster his standing within the church. The new teachers had probably damned his teachings with faint praise.

Like Tychicus, and Paul himself, Epaphras is designated a *doulos* ('bond slave') of Jesus Christ. In 1:7, Paul also calls him a 'faithful minister (*diakonos*) of Christ.' In many ways, he resembles Paul. Like Paul, he is 'always ... in prayer' for the Colossians (cp. 1:3); like Paul, he 'wrestles' or 'contends' for them (cp. 1:29); like Paul, he seeks their 'maturity' (cp. 1:28); and, like Paul, he wants them to be confirmed in 'all the will of God' (cp. 1:9).

But it is not only, or primarily, Epaphras' authority that Paul has in view; it is his profound concern for his fellow believers. The phrase 'laboring fervently' translates a Greek word (*agōnizomai*) that is also the root of the word 'agony' (cp. 1:29). Paul had watched Epaphras pray for Colossae, and this was the one word which best described his prayer. The same root word was used to describe Jesus' fervent prayer in Gethsemane (Lk. 22:44). Epaphras' prayer life cost him sweat, toil, and pain.

But it is the content of his prayer for the Christians in Colossae that makes the accusations of the new teachers so unjust. Epaphras cared! His prayer was specifically directed against the heretics who falsely offered perfection and fullness through their system. He wants them to 'stand (*histēmi*) firm.' 'Perfect' is from *teleios* and means 'complete,' 'mature,' or 'fully developed.' 'Complete' ('fully assured') is from *plērophoreō* and could be translated 'persuaded,' or 'satisfied fully.' Epaphras, like Paul (cp. 2:2), wanted the Colossians to be mature and satisfied 'in all the will of God' (*en panti thelēmati tou theou*). Epaphras was earnestly asking the Lord to confirm the Colossians in a mature spiritual stance that would honor all that the Lord had taught them. This was selfless, giving, big-hearted prayer.

Paul concluded his brief portrait of Epaphras by saying, 'I bear him witness that he has a deep concern (literally, pain or distress) for you and those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.' The word for 'work' or 'deep concern' or 'zeal' is not the usual *ergon* ('work') but the more rare *ponos*. The standard New Testament Greek lexicon offers this definition: 'work that involves much exertion or trouble.' Paul has therefore chosen a word that highlights the difficulty and degree of exertion involved in the 'work' that Epaphras was doing for the Colossians. We can only speculate why Epaphras was having so hard a time, but it is surely natural to think that the onset of the false teachers was the cause.

Epaphras had not only the Colossians to worry about; his hard work also was directed toward the neighboring Christian communities in Laodicea and Hierapolis. We have here yet another echo of Paul's description of his own ministry (cp. 2:1). Laodicea was an important city about twelve miles west of Colossae. Hierapolis, which is not mentioned in 2:1, was located about fifteen miles northwest of Colossae, thus forming something of a triangle between the three cities. Each of these cities was located on an important Roman road, and they were therefore significant centers of commerce and industry. Epaphras was probably the founder of churches in all three cities, and this verse makes clear that he continued to exercise pastoral oversight of them. Epaphras' fervent, agonizing prayers and his single-minded passion for his people's maturity must have greatly encouraged Paul and his other co-workers.

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### *b) Luke, the Beloved Physician (4:14a)*

*Luke the beloved physician...*

Luke is mentioned by name only three times in the New Testament (cp. Phm. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11), but was often involved in the action. The passages in the book of Acts where he employs the word ‘we’ tell us that he was a frequent companion of Paul, and was the last companion Paul had in his final imprisonment (2 Tim. 4:11). The affection description of him as ‘the beloved physician’ tells us that he was greatly valued by the apostle. In fact, it is from this text in Colossians that we learn two things about Luke that we would otherwise not know: that he was a Gentile and that he was a doctor.

Luke was most likely Paul’s personal physician (although this is nowhere stated in Scripture), as well as his close friend. It may have been Paul’s recurring illnesses on his first missionary journey that prompted him to take Luke along on the second. Like Paul, he was an educated, cultured man, as evidenced by the literary quality of his Greek in his gospel and the book of Acts. After joining Paul on his second missionary journey, Luke was with him for most of the remainder of Paul’s life. Luke surrendered his special talent of being a physician to God, giving up what might have been a lucrative private practice. In return, God gave him the privilege of being the only Gentile author of the New Testament, writing nearly a quarter of the New Testament. He also had the privilege of being the beloved companion of the apostle Paul. He was a much-loved Christian, physician, devoted friend, and careful historian – all in one!

### *c) Demas, the Future Backslider (4:14b)*

*...and Demas greet you.*

The reference to Demas is very poignant. Apart from a parallel citation in Philemon (Phm. 24), the next time we hear of this man, three or four years later, he had defected (2 Tim. 4:10). The pull of the world system eventually became irresistible to Demas, and he abandoned both Paul and the ministry. It was no small privilege to have been a trusted associate of the apostle Paul, yet the time came when a man who had once walked alongside a spiritual giant lost the inward battle for possession of his heart. Jesus had his Judas, and Paul had his Demas. It is comforting to note the even the two greatest leaders the world has ever known had those who failed them.

When Paul wrote to the believers in Colossae the sense of betrayal and disappointed hopes still lay in the future, but there is a solemn reminder here that the real test of a Christian is staying power. Perhaps Paul was already aware of Demas’ spiritual slide because he was the only one of the six about whom there was no comment in the greeting.

Mercifully, there was only one Demas. On the whole Paul’s friends were an impressive group. It says a great deal for the apostle himself that he attracted people of such sterling quality. These verses say a great deal about Paul himself. We not only see his evident enjoyment of people and his care for them, but it is also clear that he shared his ministry. There was nothing of the control freak about him. His use of the word ‘fellow’ is very telling. Paul did not want people to work *for* him, but *with* him.

## **C. Instructions for the Lycus Valley (Colossians 4:15-18)**

Paul’s final greeting was a three-part encouragement.

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### 1. The Church in Nymphas' House (4:15)

*Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas and the church that is in his house.*

Paul had never been to Colossae, and he had never been to Laodicea either, but his large-heartedness compelled him to greet the church and the person who so graciously hosted it. Paul had already hinted at the close relationships between the Christians in Colossae and in Laodicea (2:1; 4:13), so it is no surprise that he asked the Colossians to convey his greetings to the believers in the neighboring city. It may be that Paul writes to encourage fellowship between believers in Colossae and Laodicea by asking the former to greet the latter on his behalf. This verse raises the question as to why Paul does not ask for his greetings to be conveyed to the Christians in Hierapolis (cp. 4:13). Probably the reason Paul fails to ask that his greetings be conveyed to Hierapolis is the same as his failure to mention the church in 2:1: that the false teaching had not spread to Hierapolis and so Paul did not need to establish his apostolic authority there.

We do not know who Nymphas was, and we are even uncertain as to gender. The manuscripts are divided between Nymphas, a man's name, and Nympha, the feminine version and the corresponding pronoun (*autou*, 'his' or *autēs*, 'her'). The feminine name, with the corresponding pronoun, should probably be preferred, since it would be more natural for early scribes to think of a man as the one in whose house a church met rather than a woman. The scribes would therefore have been more likely to change an original feminine pronoun into a masculine one. The feminine 'Nympha,' then, is the option preferred by most of the modern translations and commentaries. Nympha was perhaps a wealthy widow who used her home and resources to support the church. Because of the sequence in this verse, we should probably conclude that she lived in Laodicea and that there was, then, more than one 'house church' in Laodicea. Why Paul singles out Nympha and the church that met in her house for special mention is impossible to know.

### 2. The Epistle to Laodicea (4:16)

*Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.*

Paul encouraged an exchange of the letters he was sending to Laodicea and Colossae. This letter was not just sent to the church at Colossae; its contents were also to be shared with the neighboring congregations at Laodicea and also Hierapolis (cp. 4:13). This practice of exchanging letters is otherwise unknown in the New Testament.

The standard practice in the ancient world was for someone to read the letter to the assembled group (cp. 1 Th. 5:27). He wanted them read aloud as Scripture, and Tychicus was probably entrusted with this task. We know that in the future Laodicea would need all the help it could get, as it became a church that was neither hot nor cold and was rejected by Christ (Rev. 3:14-22). In any event, this request implies that the Colossian letter was not narrowly occasional, as if it had relevance only to the Christians in Colossae. From the beginning, Paul viewed some of his letters as having more than local relevance.

There has been much debate over the identity of the Laodicean letter. It has been variously identified as a letter from the Laodiceans to Paul, a letter written by Paul from Laodicea, the apocryphal Epistle to the Laodiceans, and a genuine letter of Paul to the Laodiceans that is now lost. A favorite theory is that Paul here refers to the book of Ephesians. The oldest manuscripts

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of Ephesians do not contain the words ‘in Ephesus’ in Ephesians 1:1, indicating that it was a circular letter intended for several churches. In this scenario, Tychicus delivered Ephesians to the Laodiceans, so Paul commands the Colossians and Laodiceans to exchange letters. But if Ephesians and Colossians were written at the same time and dispatched with the same person, this scenario seems highly unlikely. Surely Paul would have included Colossae in the churches to whom ‘Ephesians’ was to be circulated. It is unlikely, then, that the ‘letter to the Laodiceans’ can be identified with any extant Pauline letter; it has been lost to us.

### 3. The Ministry of Archippus (4:17)

*And say to Archippus, ‘Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.’*

In verse 17, Paul encouraged a young leader in the Colossian church. From Philemon 2, many deduce that Archippus was the son of Philemon and Apphia. Perhaps Epaphras told the apostle of Archippus’ budding spiritual life and potential. We do not know what specific task Archippus was called to do. All we can conclude is that Archippus had been given a particular task related to his ‘ministry’ (*diakonia*), which originated ‘in the Lord.’

### 4. The Salutation of Paul (4:18)

*This salutation by my own hand—Paul. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen.*

Paul concludes his letter to the Colossians with: 1) an apostolic ‘signature’; 2) a final prayer request; and 3) a grace wish.

Letters in the ancient world were often dictated to a trained scribe who could form letters that were small (to conserve valuable papyrus) and neat. The practice of adding a brief note in the author’s own hand to authenticate the letter is known from the Greco-Roman world generally. Paul stopped dictating and wrote the final greeting with his ‘own hand.’ This was his usual practice (2 Th. 3:17; cp. 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; Phm. 19). It seems that he needed to guard against forged letters circulating around the churches that falsely claimed his authority.

Paul’s brief prayer to ‘remember my chains’ is quite poignant. As he stretched out his hand for the stylus to write his last words, the chain which fastened him to the Praetorian Guard at his side hindered him. He reawoke to the consciousness of his prison. ‘Remember my chains’ is a plea for the sympathy, emotional support and, by implication, the prayers of the believers in Colossae. Paul was in jail, but no power on earth could cage his soaring heart.

Finally, the letter ends, as it began, by commending Paul’s readers to the ‘grace’ (*charis*) of God. This apostolic benediction of grace was the trademark of all of Paul’s letters. Paul had begun his letter by asking for ‘grace’ to be upon the Colossians (1:2), and it is fitting that he concludes with a similar wish. Their need to continue and grow in their faith in the face of false teaching will be undergirded and stimulated by the continuing work of God’s grace in their midst. That sums up the message of Colossians: salvation is by grace through faith in the all-sufficient Christ, not through human works advocated by false teachers. May we be filled to overflowing with Jesus Christ!

For next time: Summer Break